

10 SUCCESSFUL COLOMBIAN EXECUTIVES WORKING ABROAD

By Robert Brandwayn

A Business English Book





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PREFACE

10 Successful Colombian Executives Working Abroad has been written for people interested in furthering their knowledge of both Business English and business in general. It contains candid conversations with bright executives and entrepreneurs from which we can all learn about their professional and personal experiences. It also contains enough grammar and vocabulary information to be a document used as a stand alone text for a Business English course.

The book is divided into ten chapters, with an interview in each one. The process of selecting the people to be interviewed was a challenging one. The interviewees had to meet a certain set of criteria: They all had to be Colombian; have a career of more than five years in the United States; and use English as their main language at work. Of course, I was very interested in how they learned and developed their use of the language and how it was adapted to meet their needs as executives. An exception to the criteria was made with Manuel Arango from Shell, since he lives and works in Europe. However, his experience in the oil and gas business was too good to be left out. Also, since the title of the book mentions interviews with “successful” executives I feel the need to explain that my definition of successful does not relate to the number of times an executive has appeared in business magazines or newspapers (although some of them have many mentions in this regard). What I was looking for were professionals who had been able to sustain a career in a different country and culture for a number of years.

In terms of business, the book contains an array of interesting subjects such as:

Advertising in Chicago; marketing for a pharmaceutical company; wealth management; budgeting for architectural projects; and quality control for a huge food multinational, to name just a few. The subject of ‘Business English’ is so broad that it is very difficult to include all the possible topics in one volume. So, the way the book was developed followed somewhat a ‘chicken and egg’ dynamic. I had an idea of some aspects of business the book had to include. However, the issues that came forth in the interviews dictated the areas of business that eventually were developed. Did I decide on human resources, corporate banking and soft skills initially? Let me explain more on this matter. The task of finding the executives and coordinating their interviews was not an easy one. It involved networking, a lot of Skype and e-mails back and forth, cold calling, and even a bit of political maneuvering. At a certain point in the process I had three stock brokers ready to talk about their experiences in the NYSE yet, in the end, the book includes none of these. Also, in some of the cases I wanted to talk about

a certain business issue but the interview, based on the executive's experience, went in a completely different direction. Was I to curtail the wisdom coming my way? For example, an interview that was supposed to be about the media business ended up being about communication in the corporate world; another that was supposed to deal with project management focused more on bidding politics and budgeting. Therefore, my choice of subject matter rested more on the outcome of each interview and some of my initial topics were eliminated. If the reader eventually needs a more comprehensive book about business in English there are many valuable sources referenced in the bibliography section.

Finally, I would like to thank all the people without whom this book would never have seen the light of day: José Manuel Restrepo, Juan Santiago Correa, Javier Murillo and Felipe Reyes at CESA for their invaluable support and enthusiasm for this project; to all ten interviewees for their time and priceless information; my wife Alexandra for her constant drive and inspiration; to Brendan Corrigan for his advice and thoroughness while editing and proofreading every draft; to Juliana Monroy, Camila Arango, Diana Correal, Ana Johanna Cubillos, Piedad Casas and all the group of teachers at BSR Idiomas for their wonderful work; and to my clients and students whose demands and needs motivate us to become better teachers and coaches.

TO THE STUDENT

This book is first and foremost an instruction book aimed at students of Business English, levels *Pre-Intermediate (A2/B1)* and *up (C1/C2)*. Regarding language instruction, the book uses the interviews as the starting point to discuss a particular grammar topic, introduce a set of new vocabulary, and offer other language issues for elementary to advanced students of English alike, such as phrasal verbs and idioms. Needless to say, all grammar issues are discussed in a Business English context and are relevant to furthering the command and understanding of Business English and English in general.

All chapters are divided into the following sections:

1. A small introduction to the topic
2. The interview
3. “Nuts & Bolts of English”: This section includes grammar, idioms, phrasal verbs, and a section called “The Word Tool Kit”, which deals with new vocabulary
4. Exercises
5. Bibliography and further reading

10 Successful Colombian Executives Working Abroad can be used individually or under the guidance of a Business English teacher or coach. (I have provided answers to all the exercises, which you can find at the back of the book.) Each Chapter also contains a list of links and books to explore if you want to expand your knowledge of a particular subject. At the end of each chapter you should be able to make sense of the specific grammar topic discussed and incorporate the new vocabulary, phrasal verbs, and idioms to your Business English lexicon. The book can also be used as a reference for the particular issues examined in each chapter. The following is an outline of the grammar points to be reviewed and, in time, assimilated. They are designed in such a way as to increase in level of difficulty (Chapter One dealing with easier subjects and Chapter Ten with more difficult ones). Some grammar issues are introduced in earlier chapters to build up the structures for grammar material further into the book.

Chapter 1. Communication Skills

This chapter features an interview with **Luis Silberwasser** from the **Discovery Channel**. In terms of grammar it focuses on the **Past Simple** (events that happened in the past and do not continue in the present) along with **idioms** and **vocabulary** related to communication: *get to the point*, *beat about the bush*, *put someone in the picture*, *argue*, *repeat*, and *influence* among others.

Chapter 2. Recruitment

This deals with the **Present Perfect** (the unfinished past: events that started in the past and have relevance in the present) and how we can always use the present perfect when writing a **cover letter** to apply for a job. It also includes **phrasal verbs** that have to do with human resources and job searches (*take part, look for, turn up, apply for, call back*, etc.) as well as **vocabulary** (*prospect, employer, assessment*, etc.) that helps a student speak about recruitment with confidence. The interviewee for this chapter is **Clemencia Macías** from **Language Line Solutions** in California.

Chapter 3. Marketing

José Vicente Puerto from **CVRx** helps us discover the importance of marketing online, regardless of the product. In terms of grammar, this chapter focuses on the slight variations of the **future tense**. You will learn what these variations imply and how, if used in a business context, they can change the meaning of the message.

Chapter 4. Investment Banking

The ability to talk about probable situations in the present is vital to any entrepreneur and executive. The **Zero and First Conditionals** help us transmit this. Through the explanations and exercises in this chapter we expect you to grasp the intricacies of this difficult subject matter. **Jaime Beckman** from **Krauss Morgan** will tell us about the subtle skills needed in Corporate Banking.

Chapter 5. The Internet Startup

It makes sense to follow the discussion of the First Conditional with the ability to discuss *hypothetical situations in the future*, something that the **Second Conditional** does. This topic assumes knowledge of difficult subjects such as the Present Perfect (covered in Chapter 2) and the participles. The chapter also demonstrates the use of Internet phrasal verbs such as *plug in, scroll down*, and *log in* as well as Internet vocabulary like *bandwidth, attachment*, and *browser*. **Luis Becerra** from **Batanga.com** is the interviewee for this chapter in which he discusses the many challenges an Internet startup faces.

Chapter 6. The Budget

The ability to discuss *hypothetical situations in the past* is the focus of this chapter, which deals with the **Third Conditional**. It requires knowledge of the both

the Present Perfect (Ch. 2) and the Past Perfect (a brief reminder is included in this section to aid in the understanding of the subject). **Miguel Pardo** from **LA Architecture** gives us his insight on the intricacies of bidding and budgeting for architectural projects in California.

Chapter 7. Soft Skills

Roberto Silva from **Medtronic** in Minneapolis gives us an account of the importance of soft skills for any executive working in a corporation nowadays. The grammar focus will be on **Modal Verbs**, their differences, structure, and relevance in business communication (both written and oral).

Chapter 8. Trends

The grammar spotlight comes down on trend verbs and adverbs in this chapter. **Manuel Arango**, who works for the gas and oil multinational **Shell**, helps us explain how there is nothing more practical for today's executive than being able to **explain trends and variations** that change over time. At the end of this chapter you should be able to use the introduced vocabulary in a successful way during your presentations.

Chapter 9. Advertising

To be a successful executive you have to be able to write well. If you are of the opinion that English is a tool more than a language (even if Shakespeare turns in his grave) then emphasis on **connectors** (*however, furthermore, nevertheless, etc.*) is a must in order to improve your writing. **Diana Samper** from the **Marketing Store** in Chicago gets straight to the point explaining the importance of the written word in today's business and the fine details of working in the advertising world in the United States.

Chapter 10. Processes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to identify the difference between the **Active** and the **Passive** voice and in what context to use them. The Passive voice for example, is helpful in reporting events, describing sequences, and in writing e-mails and memos. **Hugo Gutiérrez** from **General Mills** uses it often in his interview about quality control and industrial processes.

"10 Successful Colombian Executives Working Abroad" gives us a portrait of how a group of Colombian executives was able to overcome language barriers and develop a convincing and fluid discourse which has allowed them to stand out and empower themselves in the global entrepreneurial arena.

Entrepreneurs, intrapreneurs, high executives, and professionals alike, need tools in order to dominate the interior voice which inhibits their free and assertive functioning in English. The content of this book brings us closer to successful experiences and models that we can all learn from. It shows us cases where the ability to express ideas in English has enabled these skilled executives to open the doors of excellence and achievement in their careers.

"10 Successful Colombian Executives Working Abroad" nos cuenta como un grupo de ejecutivos colombianos logró vencer las barreras del idioma inglés y desarrollar un discurso fluido y convincente que les ha permitido destacarse y empoderarse en el medio empresarial global.

Emprendedores, intraemprendores, altos ejecutivos y profesionales, necesitan herramientas para aprender a dominar la voz interior que los inhibe a desenvolverse libre y asertivamente en inglés.

El contenido de este libro nos aproxima a experiencias exitosas y modelos a seguir, con casos en donde la serenidad para expresarse en inglés, se unió a las competencias profesionales de cada ejecutivo y les abrió puertas a la excelencia en sus carreras.

